

## Tracing The Origin and Rise of HOMECOMING™

*A look through all the previous events of HOMECOMING™*

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In April 2018, Lagos witnessed the birth of a cultural phenomenon that would redefine the city's creative landscape: HOMECOMING™. Founded by British-Nigerian music executive Grace Ladoja MBE, the festival was conceived as a bridge connecting Africa and its diaspora, celebrating the continent's rich tapestry of music, fashion, art, and sports.

The inaugural edition set the tone for what would become an annual Easter weekend tradition. With performances from heavyweights like Skepta, Wizkid, and Tiwa Savage, and appearances by global icons such as Naomi Campbell and John Boyega, the festival immediately positioned itself as a connective platform of global and local talent. It has also served as an incubator for frontline talent: Rema performed for the first time on stage at HOMECOMING™ and the festival played host to Tems just before her mainstream breakthrough. Still, the festival wasn't just about music; it featured fashion pop-ups, art exhibitions, and even a football match, embodying the multifaceted nature of Lagos's creative spirit.

In 2019, HOMECOMING™ expanded its reach, featuring alte artists like Odunsi, Santi, and BOJ, who were critical to the global rise to fame of the alte movement. The festival's commitment to nurturing emerging talent was evident, providing a platform for these alternative artists to showcase their craft to a diverse audience. Fashion remained a cornerstone, with collaborations from brands like Off-White, Nike, and Ambush, further establishing Lagos's profile as a style capital.

While the star-studded lineups were always a spectacle, it was the cultural weight behind HOMECOMING™ that gave it depth. It evolved into a creative nerve centre, fostering a space where local genius met global attention. The *HOMECOMING™ Pop-Up* in particular became a turning point: a powerful redefinition of how Nigerian fashion was seen, both at home and abroad. With brands like MejiMeji, PithAfrica, Mowalola, and Patta holding their own beside established international labels.

The 2020 edition faced unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Demonstrating resilience, the festival transitioned to a digital format, offering virtual performances, panel discussions, and fashion showcases. This pivot not only deepened engagement with its audience but also expanded its global reach, allowing participants from around the world to experience Lagos's vibrant culture from their screens and homes. A highlight of the digital edition was the participation of Virgil Abloh, who was involved in the "Can Africa Regenerate Streetwear?" panel. This discussion heard opinions from influential figures such as Angelo Baque of AWAKE, Gee Patta, and founders of influential streetwear brands like Motherlan, Daily Paper, and Vivendii.

By 2021 and 2022, HOMECOMING™ had evolved, becoming a huge cultural moment in West Africa. The events featured a blend of established and emerging artists, including Asake, Fireboy DML, and ArrDee, reflecting the dynamic nature of Nigeria's music scene and the ethos of international exchange that the festival was founded on. Fashion remained at the forefront, with attendees showcasing eclectic styles that blended traditional Nigerian attire with contemporary trends, highlighting the city's sartorial innovation.

The festival also deepened its commitment to community building. With collaborations benefiting Nigerian tailors and designers, as well as football matches, it became evident that HOMECOMING™ was multifaceted. It was a force for promoting collaboration and creating tangible impacts. Workshops and knowledge-sharing sessions also flourished, with panels featuring industry leaders discussing everything from the future of African streetwear to creative collaboration across borders.

In 2023, the festival continued its upward trajectory. The inclusion of more panels and workshops emphasised its role in fostering dialogue around Africa's creative industries. These discussions, such as "Building Empowered Narratives: African Creatives Taking Control Of Their Own Stories," provided invaluable insights from industry figures like David Sonubi of No Signal and Ireti Zaccheus, founder of Street Souk.

The football matches also continued, with friendly games like Homecoming All-Stars vs Native Records FC, allowing artists and creatives to bond and share in the celebration of culture and sport. The festival's ability to adapt and remain relevant speaks to its foundational goal: to celebrate and elevate African creativity on a global stage. As Grace Ladoja aptly stated, "Our Homecoming is about creating a space where African creatives can connect, collaborate, and showcase their talents to the world." This ethos has been the driving force behind the festival's success, making it a cornerstone of Lagos's cultural calendar and a beacon for African creativity worldwide.